A bill to be entitled

An act relating to real property used for conservation purposes; creating s. 196.26, F.S.; providing a full or partial exemption to land dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes; providing definitions; providing special provisions for land consisting of less than 40 acres; providing for the assessment of buildings and structures on such lands; providing that best management practices be used for agricultural lands; providing for third-party conservation easement enforcement rights to affected governments; creating the Board of Conservation consisting of 9 members to make certain determinations; amending s. 193.501, F.S.; removing a cross-reference; amending s. 704.06, F.S.; providing that owners of property encumbered by a conservation easement must comply with the requirements of ch.712 to preserve the easement in perpetuity; amending s. 195.073, F.S.; adding a type of property to properties that must be classified; amending s. 196.011, F.S.; providing for renewal applications and penalties for an exemption; providing an effective date.

21

1

2

3

4

5

6 7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

2324

22

Section 1. Section 196.26, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

2526

196.26. Exemption for real property dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes.--

2728

(1) As used in this section:

Page 1 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

|  | (a) | "Conservation | purposes" | means: |
|--|-----|---------------|-----------|--------|
|--|-----|---------------|-----------|--------|

- 1. Retention of the substantial natural value of the land, including, woodlands, wetlands, water courses, ponds, streams, and natural open spaces;
- 2. Retention of such lands as suitable habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife; or
- 3. Retention of such lands' natural value for water quality enhancement or water recharge.
- (b) "Conservation easement" means the property right described in s. 704.06.
- (c) "Dedicated in perpetuity" means that the land is encumbered by an irrevocable, perpetual conservation easement.
- (d) "Allowed commercial uses" means commercial uses that are allowed by the conservation easement encumbering the land exempt from taxation under this section.
- (2) Land that is dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes and that is used exclusively for conservation purposes is exempt from ad valorem taxation.
- (3) Land that is dedicated in perpetuity for conservation purposes and that is used for allowed commercial uses is exempt from ad valorem taxation to the extent of 50 percent of the assessed value of the land.
- (4) Land that comprises less than 40 contiguous acres does not qualify for the exemption provided in this section unless, in addition to meeting the other requirements of this section, the Board of Conservation determines that the use of the land for conservation purposes meets a clearly delineated state conservation policy and yields a significant public benefit. The

Page 2 of 19

determination of whether a significant public benefit exists
must include consideration of the fiscal impact the exemption
provided in this section will have on affected governments and
other taxpayers.

- (5) Buildings, structures and other improvements situated on land receiving the exemption provided in this section and the land area immediately surrounding the improvements must be assessed separately pursuant to the provisions of chapter 193.
- (6) Land that qualifies for the exemption provided in this section and whose allowed commercial uses include agriculture must comply with the most recent best-management practices if adopted by rule of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- (7) As provided for in s. 704.06(8) and (9), county or municipal governments with jurisdiction over lands receiving the exemption provided in this section have a third-party right of enforcement to enforce the terms of the applicable conservation easement.
- (8) (a) The Board of Conservation is established to make the determinations required by subsection (4).
- (b) The board shall consist of nine members. The Governor shall appoint five members representing a rural county government, a medium county government, a large county government, and two nationally recognized organizations whose purposes include the preservation of conservation lands. The remaining four members shall consist of employees designated by the agency heads of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of

Page 3 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

Community Affairs and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Section 2. Section 193.501, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

193.501 Assessment of lands subject to a conservation easement, environmentally endangered lands, or lands used for outdoor recreational or park purposes when land development rights have been conveyed or conservation restrictions have been covenanted.--

- (1) The owner or owners in fee of any land subject to a conservation easement as described in s. 704.06<del>(1)</del>; land qualified as environmentally endangered pursuant to paragraph (6)(i) and so designated by formal resolution of the governing board of the municipality or county within which such land is located; land designated as conservation land in a comprehensive plan adopted by the appropriate municipal or county governing body; or any land which is utilized for outdoor recreational or park purposes may, by appropriate instrument, for a term of not less than 10 years:
- (a) Convey the development right of such land to the governing board of any public agency in this state within which the land is located, or to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, or to a charitable corporation or trust as described in s. 704.06(3); or
- (b) Covenant with the governing board of any public agency in this state within which the land is located, or with the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, or with a charitable corporation or trust as described in s.

Page 4 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

704.06(3), that such land be subject to one or more of the conservation restrictions provided in s. 704.06(1) or not be used by the owner for any purpose other than outdoor recreational or park purposes. If land is covenanted and used for an outdoor recreational purpose, the normal use and maintenance of the land for that purpose, consistent with the covenant, shall not be restricted.

- (2) The governing board of any public agency in this state, or the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, or a charitable corporation or trust as described in s. 704.06(3), is authorized and empowered in its discretion to accept any and all instruments conveying the development right of any such land or establishing a covenant pursuant to subsection (1), and if accepted by the board or charitable corporation or trust, the instrument shall be promptly filed with the appropriate officer for recording in the same manner as any other instrument affecting the title to real property.
- (3) When, pursuant to subsections (1) and (2), the development right in real property has been conveyed to the governing board of any public agency of this state, to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, or to a charitable corporation or trust as described in s. 704.06(2), or a covenant has been executed and accepted by the board or charitable corporation or trust, the lands which are the subject of such conveyance or covenant shall be thereafter assessed as provided herein:
- (a) If the covenant or conveyance extends for a period of not less than 10 years from January 1 in the year such

Page 5 of 19

assessment is made, the property appraiser, in valuing such land for tax purposes, shall consider no factors other than those relative to its value for the present use, as restricted by any conveyance or covenant under this section.

- (b) If the covenant or conveyance extends for a period less than 10 years, the land shall be assessed under the provisions of s. 193.011, recognizing the nature and length thereof of any restriction placed on the use of the land under the provisions of subsection (1).
- (4) After making a conveyance of the development right or executing a covenant pursuant to this section, or conveying a conservation easement pursuant to this section and s. 704.06, the owner of the land shall not use the land in any manner not consistent with the development right voluntarily conveyed, or with the restrictions voluntarily imposed, or with the terms of the conservation easement or shall not change the use of the land from outdoor recreational or park purposes during the term of such conveyance or covenant without first obtaining a written instrument from the board or charitable corporation or trust, which instrument reconveys all or part of the development right to the owner or releases the owner from the terms of the covenant and which instrument must be promptly recorded in the same manner as any other instrument affecting the title to real property. Upon obtaining approval for reconveyance or release, the reconveyance or release shall be made to the owner upon payment of the deferred tax liability. Any payment of the deferred tax liability shall be payable to the county tax collector within 90 days of the date of approval by the board or

Page 6 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

141

142

143

144

145

146

147

148

149

150

151

152

153

154

155

156

157

158

159

160

161

162

163164

165

166

167

168

charitable corporation or trust of the reconveyance or release. The collector shall distribute the payment to each governmental unit in the proportion that its millage bears to the total millage levied on the parcel for the years in which such conveyance or covenant was in effect.

The governing board of any public agency or the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund or a charitable corporation or trust which holds title to a development right pursuant to this section may not convey that development right to anyone other than the governing board of another public agency or a charitable corporation or trust, as described in s. 704.06(3), or the record owner of the fee interest in the land to which the development right attaches. The conveyance from the governing board of a public agency or the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund to the owner of the fee shall be made only after a determination by the board that such conveyance would not adversely affect the interest of the public. Section 125.35 does not apply to such sales, but any public agency accepting any instrument conveying a development right pursuant to this section shall forthwith adopt appropriate regulations and procedures governing the disposition of same. These regulations and procedures must provide in part that the board may not convey a development right to the owner of the fee without first holding a public hearing and unless notice of the proposed conveyance and the time and place at which the public hearing is to be held is published once a week for at least 2 weeks in some newspaper of general circulation in the county involved prior to the hearing.

Page 7 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

169

170

171

172

173

174

175

176

177178

179

180

181

182

183

184

185

186

187

188189

190

191

192

193

194

195

196

- (6) The following terms whenever used as referred to in this section have the following meanings unless a different meaning is clearly indicated by the context:
- (a) "Board" is the governing board of any city, county, or other public agency of the state or the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund.
- (b) "Conservation restriction" means a limitation on a right to the use of land for purposes of conserving or preserving land or water areas predominantly in their natural, scenic, open, agricultural, or wooded condition. The limitation on rights to the use of land may involve or pertain to any of the activities enumerated in s. 704.06(1).
- (c) "Conservation easement" means that property right described in s. 704.06.
  - (d) "Covenant" is a covenant running with the land.
- (e) "Deferred tax liability" means an amount equal to the difference between the total amount of taxes that would have been due in March in each of the previous years in which the conveyance or covenant was in effect if the property had been assessed under the provisions of s. 193.011 and the total amount of taxes actually paid in those years when the property was assessed under the provisions of this section, plus interest on that difference computed as provided in s. 212.12(3).
- (f) "Development right" is the right of the owner of the fee interest in the land to change the use of the land.
- (g) "Outdoor recreational or park purposes" includes, but is not necessarily limited to, boating, golfing, camping, swimming, horseback riding, and archaeological, scenic, or

Page 8 of 19

scientific sites and applies only to land which is open to the general public.

- (h) "Present use" is the manner in which the land is utilized on January 1 of the year in which the assessment is made.
- (i) "Qualified as environmentally endangered" means land that has unique ecological characteristics, rare or limited combinations of geological formations, or features of a rare or limited nature constituting habitat suitable for fish, plants, or wildlife, and which, if subject to a development moratorium or one or more conservation easements or development restrictions appropriate to retaining such land or water areas predominantly in their natural state, would be consistent with the conservation, recreation and open space, and, if applicable, coastal protection elements of the comprehensive plan adopted by formal action of the local governing body pursuant to s.

  163.3161, the Local Government Comprehensive Planning and Land Development Regulation Act; or surface waters and wetlands, as determined by the methodology ratified in s. 373.4211.
- (7)(a) The property appraiser shall report to the department showing the just value and the classified use value of property that is subject to a conservation easement under s. 704.06, property assessed as environmentally endangered land pursuant to this section, and property assessed as outdoor recreational or park land.
- (b) The tax collector shall annually report to the department the amount of deferred tax liability collected pursuant to this section.

Page 9 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

Section 3. Section 704.06, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

- 704.06 Conservation easements; creation; acquisition; enforcement.--
- (1) As used in this section, "conservation easement" means a right or interest in real property which is appropriate to retaining land or water areas predominantly in their natural, scenic, open, agricultural, or wooded condition; retaining such areas as suitable habitat for fish, plants, or wildlife; retaining the structural integrity or physical appearance of sites or properties of historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance; or maintaining existing land uses and which prohibits or limits any or all of the following:
- (a) Construction or placing of buildings, roads, signs, billboards or other advertising, utilities, or other structures on or above the ground.
- (b) Dumping or placing of soil or other substance or material as landfill or dumping or placing of trash, waste, or unsightly or offensive materials.
- (c) Removal or destruction of trees, shrubs, or other vegetation.
- (d) Excavation, dredging, or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock, or other material substance in such manner as to affect the surface.
- (e) Surface use except for purposes that permit the land or water area to remain predominantly in its natural condition.
  - (f) Activities detrimental to drainage, flood control,

Page 10 of 19

water conservation, erosion control, soil conservation, or fish and wildlife habitat preservation.

- (g) Acts or uses detrimental to such retention of land or water areas.
- (h) Acts or uses detrimental to the preservation of the structural integrity or physical appearance of sites or properties of historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance.
- (2) Conservation easements are perpetual, undivided interests in property and may be created or stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant, or condition in any deed, will, or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the property, or in any order of taking. Such easements may be acquired in the same manner as other interests in property are acquired, except by condemnation or by other exercise of the power of eminent domain, and shall not be unassignable to other governmental bodies or agencies, charitable organizations, or trusts authorized to acquire such easements, for lack of benefit to a dominant estate.
- (3) Conservation easements may be acquired by any governmental body or agency or by a charitable corporation or trust whose purposes include protecting natural, scenic, or open space values of real property, assuring its availability for agricultural, forest, recreational, or open space use, protecting natural resources, maintaining or enhancing air or water quality, or preserving sites or properties of historical, architectural, archaeological, or cultural significance.
  - (4) Conservation easements shall run with the land and be

Page 11 of 19

binding on all subsequent owners of the servient estate. Notwithstanding the provisions of s. 197.552, all provisions of a conservation easement shall survive and are enforceable after the issuance of a tax deed. No conservation easement shall be unenforceable on account of lack of privity of contract or lack of benefit to particular land or on account of the benefit being assignable. Conservation easements may be enforced by injunction or proceeding in equity or at law, and shall entitle the holder to enter the land in a reasonable manner and at reasonable times to assure compliance. A conservation easement may be released by the holder of the easement to the holder of the fee even though the holder of the fee may not be a governmental body or a charitable corporation or trust.

- (5) All conservation easements shall be recorded and indexed in the same manner as any other instrument affecting the title to real property.
- (6) The provisions of this section shall not be construed to imply that any restriction, easement, covenant, or condition which does not have the benefit of this section shall, on account of any provision hereof, be unenforceable.
- (7) Recording of the conservation easement shall be notice to the property appraiser and tax collector of the county of the conveyance of the conservation easement.
- (8) Conservation easements may provide for a third-party right of enforcement. As used in this section, third-party right of enforcement means a right provided in a conservation easement to enforce any of its terms granted to a governmental body, or charitable corporation or trust as described in subsection (3),

Page 12 of 19

which although eligible to be a holder, is not a holder.

- (9) An action affecting a conservation easement may be brought by:
- (a) An owner of an interest in the real property burdened by the easement;
  - (b) A holder of the easement;
  - (c) A person having a third-party right of enforcement; or
  - (d) A person authorized by another law.
- (10) The ownership or attempted enforcement of rights held by the holder of an easement does not subject the holder to any liability for any damage or injury that may be suffered by any person on the property or as a result of the condition of the property encumbered by a conservation easement.
- shall be construed to prohibit or limit the owner of land, or the owner of a conservation easement over land, to voluntarily negotiate the sale or utilization of such lands or easement for the construction and operation of linear facilities, including electric transmission and distribution facilities, telecommunications transmission and distribution facilities, pipeline transmission and distribution facilities, public transportation corridors, and related appurtenances, nor shall this section prohibit the use of eminent domain for said purposes as established by law. In any legal proceeding to condemn land for the purpose of construction and operation of a linear facility as described above, the court shall consider the public benefit provided by the conservation easement and linear facilities in determining which lands may be taken and the

Page 13 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

compensation paid.

365

366

367

368

369

370

371

372

373

374

375

376

377

378

379

380

381

382

383

384

385

386

387

389

390

391

(12) An owner of property encumbered by a conservation easement must abide by the requirements of ch.712 or any other similar law or rule to preserve the conservation easement in perpetuity.

Section 4. Subsection (1) of section 195.073, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

195.073 Classification of property.—All items required by law to be on the assessment rolls must receive a classification based upon the use of the property. The department shall promulgate uniform definitions for all classifications. The department may designate other subclassifications of property. No assessment roll may be approved by the department which does not show proper classifications.

- (1) Real property must be classified according to the assessment basis of the land into the following classes:
- (a) Residential, subclassified into categories, one category for homestead property and one for nonhomestead property:
  - 1. Single family.
  - 2. Mobile homes.
  - 3. Multifamily.
- 4. Condominiums.
- 388 5. Cooperatives.
  - 6. Retirement homes.
  - (b) Commercial and industrial.
  - (c) Agricultural.
- 392 (d) Nonagricultural acreage.

Page 14 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

(e) High-water recharge.

- (f) Historic property used for commercial or certain nonprofit purposes.
  - (g) Exempt, wholly or partially.
  - (h) Centrally assessed.
  - (i) Leasehold interests.
  - (j) Time-share property.
  - (k) Land assessed under s. 193.501.
- 401 (1)  $\frac{(k)}{(k)}$  Other.

393

394

395

396

397

398

399

400

402

403

404

405

406

407

408

409

410

411

412

413

414

415

416

417

418

419

420

Section 5. Subsections (6) and (9) of section 196.011, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

196.011 Annual application required for exemption .--

- (6) (a) Once an original application for tax exemption has been granted, in each succeeding year on or before February 1, the property appraiser shall mail a renewal application to the applicant, and the property appraiser shall accept from each such applicant a renewal application on a form to be prescribed by the Department of Revenue. Such renewal application shall be accepted as evidence of exemption by the property appraiser unless he or she denies the application. Upon denial, the property appraiser shall serve, on or before July 1 of each year, a notice setting forth the grounds for denial on the applicant by first-class mail. Any applicant objecting to such denial may file a petition as provided for in s. 194.011(3).
- (b) Once an original application for the tax exemption has been granted under s. 196.26, in each succeeding year on or before February 1, the property appraiser shall mail a renewal application to the applicant on a form prescribed by the

Page 15 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

Department of Revenue. The applicant must certify on the form that the use of the property complies with the restrictions and requirements of the conservation easement. The form shall include a statement that the exemption granted under s. 196.26 will not be renewed unless the application is returned to the property appraiser.

A county may, at the request of the property appraiser and by a majority vote of its governing body, waive the requirement that an annual application or statement be made for exemption of property within the county after an initial application is made and the exemption granted. The waiver under this subsection of the annual application or statement requirement applies to all exemptions under this chapter except the exemption under s. 196.1995. Notwithstanding such waiver, refiling of an application or statement shall be required when any property granted an exemption is sold or otherwise disposed of, when the ownership changes in any manner, when the applicant for homestead exemption ceases to use the property as his or her homestead, or when the status of the owner changes so as to change the exempt status of the property. In its deliberations on whether to waive the annual application or statement requirement, the governing body shall consider the possibility of fraudulent exemption claims which may occur due to the waiver of the annual application requirement. It is The duty of the owner of any property granted an exemption who is not required to file an annual application or statement has a duty to notify the property appraiser promptly whenever the use of the property or the status or condition of the owner changes so as to change

Page 16 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

421

422

423

424

425

426

427

428

429

430

431

432

433

434

435

436

437

438

439

440

441

442

443

444

445

446

447

448

the exempt status of the property. If any property owner fails to so notify the property appraiser and the property appraiser determines that for any year within the prior 10 years the owner was not entitled to receive such exemption, the owner of the property is subject to the taxes exempted as a result of such failure plus 15 percent interest per annum and a penalty of 50 percent of the taxes exempted. Except for homestead exemptions controlled by s. 196.161, it is the duty of the property appraiser making such determination has a duty to record in the public records of the county a notice of tax lien against any property owned by that person or entity in the county, and such property must be identified in the notice of tax lien. Such property is subject to the payment of all taxes and penalties. Such lien when filed shall attach to any property, identified in the notice of tax lien, owned by the person who illegally or improperly received the exemption. Should such person no longer own property in that county, but own property in some other county or counties in the state, it shall be the duty of the property appraiser has a duty to record a notice of tax lien in such other county or counties, identifying the property owned by such person or entity in such county or counties, and it shall become a lien against such property in such county or counties.

(b) The owner of any property granted an exemption under s. 196.26 has a duty to notify the property appraiser promptly whenever the use of the property no longer complies with the restrictions and requirements of the conservation easement. If the property owner fails to so notify the property appraiser and the property appraiser determines that for any year within the

Page 17 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

449

450

451

452

453

454

455

456

457

458

459

460

461

462

463

464

465

466

467

468

469

470

471

472473

474

475

476

preceding 10 years the owner was not entitled to receive the exemption, the owner of the property is subject to taxes exempted as a result of the failure plus 18 percent interest per annum and a penalty of 100 percent of the taxes exempted. The provisions for tax liens in paragraph (a) apply to property granted an exemption under s. 196.26.

(c) (b) A county may, at the request of the property appraiser and by a majority vote of its governing body, waive the requirement that an annual application be made for the veteran's disability discount granted pursuant to s. 6(g), Art. VII of the State Constitution after an initial application is made and the discount granted. It is the duty of The disabled veteran receiving a discount for which annual application has been waived has a duty to notify the property appraiser promptly whenever the use of the property or the percentage of disability to which the veteran is entitled changes. If a disabled veteran fails to notify the property appraiser and the property appraiser determines that for any year within the prior 10 years the veteran was not entitled to receive all or a portion of such discount, the penalties and processes in paragraph (a) relating to the failure to notify the property appraiser of ineligibility for an exemption shall apply.

(d) (e) For any exemption under s. 196.101(2), the statement concerning gross income must be filed with the property appraiser not later than March 1 of every year.

 $\underline{\text{(e)}}$  (d) If an exemption for which the annual application is waived pursuant to this subsection will be denied by the property appraiser in the absence of the refiling of the

Page 18 of 19

PCB FTC 09-02a

477

478

479

480

481

482

483

484

485

486

487

488

489

490

491

492

493

494

495

496

497

498

499

500

501

502

503

504

application, notification of an intent to deny the exemption shall be mailed to the owner of the property prior to February 1. If the property appraiser fails to timely mail such notice, the application deadline for such property owner pursuant to subsection (1) shall be extended to 28 days after the date on which the property appraiser mails such notice.

Section 6. The Department of Revenue may adopt emergency rules to administer Section 196.26, Florida Statutes. The emergency rules shall remain in effect for 6 months after adoption and may be renewed during the pendency of procedures to adopt rules addressing the subject of the emergency rules.

Section 7. This act shall take effect upon becoming law, and applies to property tax assessments made on or after January 1, 2010.